



# NOAA Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program

## How does Habitat Loss and Degradation Affect Great Lakes Constituents?

Beach closings, large-scale contaminated sites, invasive species, and fish consumption advisories are just some of the impacts of habitat loss and degradation. For example, the United States and Canada have identified 43 Areas of Concern (AOC) with severe environmental degradation including sediment and water contamination and impaired fish and benthic communities.

## What is Needed to Restore and Protect Great Lakes Coastal Habitat?

Habitat loss and degradation are region-wide issues that span the entire Great Lakes basin. Thus, strong partnerships and sharing expertise, knowledge, and resources are the keys to effective restoration and protection. On May 18, 2004 President Bush signed an Executive Order that described the Great Lakes as a “national treasure” and established a cabinet-level Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to help establish regional collaboration and better integration of effort.

Secondly, any restoration efforts need to be accompanied by sufficient data collection to help set funding priorities and measure success. A **science-based approach** will

insure that efforts are directed at the most important sources of the problems, that the socio-economic consequences of the restoration efforts are evaluated and to monitor the success of the restoration effort in achieving its goal(s).

## What Has NOAA Proposed to do?

In recognition of this continued need for collaboration and integration, the President’s FY 2006 budget request includes language\* that “NOAA will utilize \$1,500,000 and 3 FTE’s of base resources [under the NOAA Fisheries Habitat Restoration line item of the Habitat Conservation and Restoration subactivity] to establish a Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Program, emphasizing protection and restoration of NOAA trust resources at the watershed scale within the Great Lakes Areas of Concern. NOAA’s program will focus on restoring Great Lakes aquatic resources and will provide technical support for commonly occurring lake-wide problems (e.g., invasive species, contaminated sediment and the presence of persistent contaminants, beach closings, and loss of high-quality fish and wildlife habitat).”

## What Will Be Accomplished?

The two primary components of the Great Lakes Restoration Program will be (1) establishment of a cross-NOAA Habitat Restoration Program Office at NOAA’s Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory (GLERL) to identify partner agencies at bi-national, federal, state/provincial, and local levels and develop a strategy to foster renewed collaboration and integration, and (2) funding for ecosystem-based, science-driven restoration projects that can be used to support the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force and the GLERL and to develop scientific, ecosystem-based guidelines for other regions. NOAA is currently using its expertise in contaminant mitigation and remediation to support our EPA, state, and federal trustee partners at Superfund sites. We will build on these efforts and also partner with local non-government organizations and community groups to restore habitat through community-based restoration projects.



## Community-Based Restoration Projects

The centerpiece of the program will be one or more community-based demonstration restoration projects in the AOC's that are based on science, are ecosystem focused, and deal with significant problems and lake-wide improvements. It is expected that a competitive community-based proposal process will provide for partnerships and additional funds from other federal agencies, states, and local municipalities. Project areas will be selected at locations where maximum use can be made of ongoing restoration efforts and partnerships, availability of matching funds, significance of the problem to the Great Lakes, value of the project as a demonstration project for the Great Lakes region and at the lake level, NOAA mission, established priorities, and scientific merit of the restoration.

## What Will NOAA Contribute?

In addition to actual Great Lakes Restoration, this program will demonstrate the process and value of using a **science-based, ecosystem approach** in restoration efforts. NOAA is a science-based agency and can thus provide an ecosystem approach to the restoration process. The demonstration projects will be supported by a scientific effort at the beginning of the projects, monitoring during the restoration phase, and analyses and assessment after the restoration has been completed. Results will be used to develop guidelines for other science-based restoration efforts throughout the Great Lakes basin.

## How Will Great Lakes Science be Integrated into Habitat Restoration?

The Habitat Restoration Program Office will take advantage of GLERL's strong scientific expertise to develop

collaborative, integrated science-based restoration strategies. In addition the co-location at GLERL will promote cooperation and communication with the GLERL-based:

- ◆ **NOAA Center of Excellence for Great Lakes and Human Health**
- ◆ **NOAA National Center for Research on Invasive Species (NCRAIS)**
- ◆ **Great Lakes Sea Grant Network Extension Agents (and liaison with the seven Great Lakes Sea Grant Programs).**

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